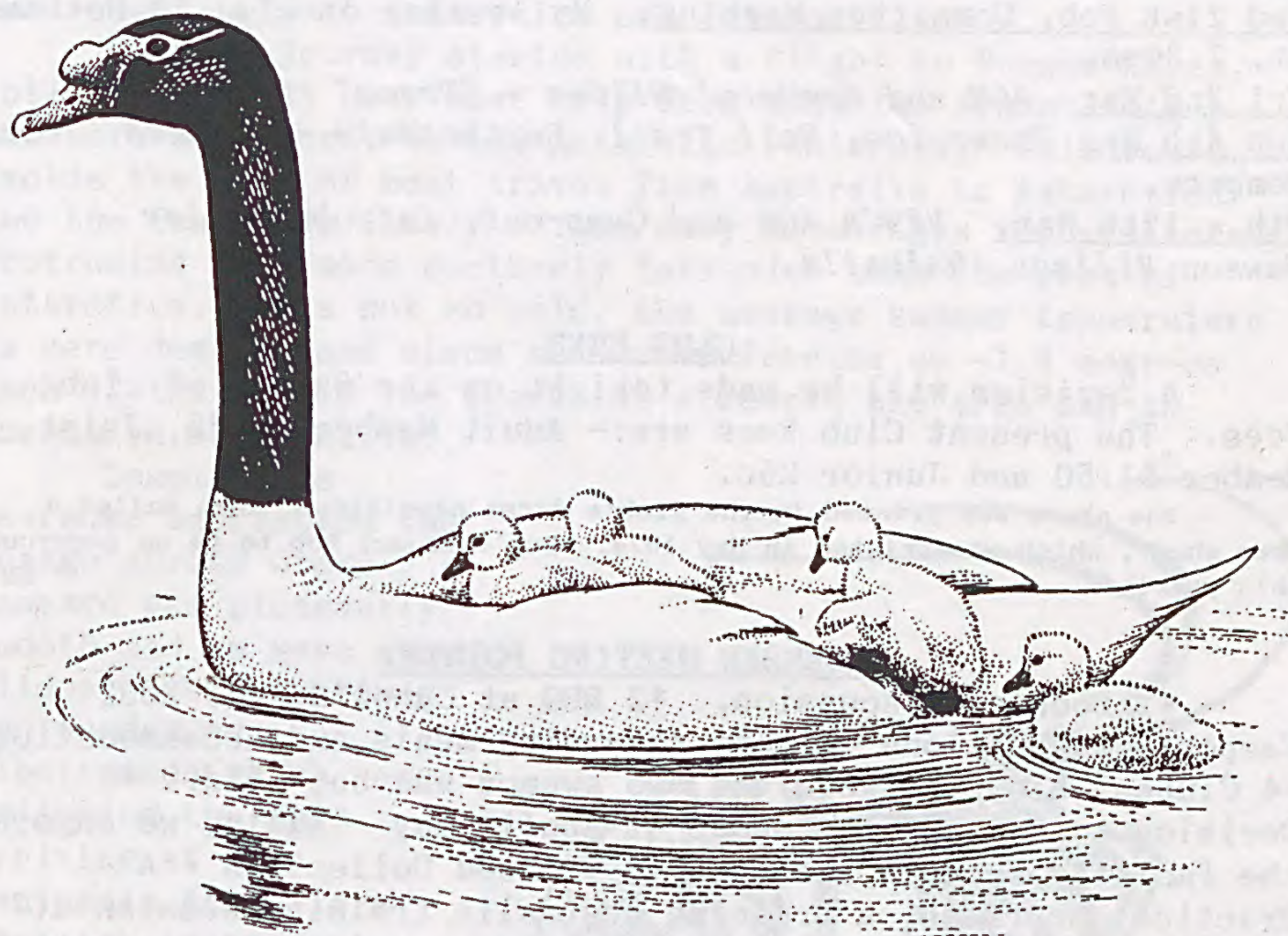


Field Naturalists' Club

of Ballarat Inc February 2001



BLACK-NECKED SWANS

The sight of a swan carrying cygnets on its back is one of the most appealing aspects of parental care...The behaviour is especially common in the black-necked swan...The obvious advantages are that the cygnets can sleep warm and dry among the feathers... and are also out of reach of predators...In the case of the black-necked swan the cob sometimes takes over the duty entirely.

From "The Swans" by Peter Scott and the Wildfowl Trust. Picture by Robert Gilmour.

DIARY DATES

Fri 2nd Feb 2001 Meeting - Tree Protection Systems Paul Norquay

Sun 4th Feb. Excursion - Bamganie - Meredith Landcare. Robert McColl

Thur 15th Feb. Excursion, Lake Wendouree North Gardens. 5pm, meet near the picnic shelter, North Gardens Reserve. See the exciting new development.

Wed 21st Feb, Committee Meeting. My brother Jack's, , 7.30pm.

Fri 2nd Mar AGM and Members' Slides - "Trees"

Sun 4th Mar Excursion, Rail Trail, Smythesdale - Skipton. Club Members.

9th - 12th Mar. VFNCA AGM and Camp-out, Latrobe Valley - Rawson Village, Walhalla.

CLUB FEES

A decision will be made tonight on the matter of club fees. The present Club Fees are:- Adult Member \$1.25, Joint Member \$1.50 and Junior 25c.

The above was printed in the club's first newsletter, then called a news sheet, which was printed in May 1974. Don't expect Bob to be so generous this year!

ED

DECEMBER MEETING POINTS.

*1 Booklet discussion. *2 BBQ at Carol's. *3 2002 Campout, suggestions welcome regarding meals and accommodation. *4 Clunes, block between the two swamps was not sold. *5 Decision to have 2001 campout at Apollo Bay - again, we enjoyed the facility so much last year! *6 Seed Collection - A Practical Approach, a Greening Australia training session at Creswick Landcare centre, Gail Whyte to attend. *7 Big Hill, Open Cut Mine, Stawell, mining application rejected, but it is thought that the mining company plans to appeal.

FIELD REPORTS

Long necked tortoise, taken up residence in farm dam at Durham Lead, 500m from creek and about 40m uphill. // Considerable clumps of brunonia in light forest, private property off Pryor's Rd, 30th Nov, Margaret Tonkin. // Pair of sacred kingfishers at north end of Fairyland. Baillon's crake in Lake Lodge Pond. Yellow billed spoonbill roosting among ibis on willow island near BHS boatshed. // Following 3 years of holding leaves without new growth, E. leucoxydon dropping all old leaves and has on new growth after soaking spring rain, 30th Nov, John Mildren. // Brolgas, pair plus juvenile, mid November. Colony nesting:- little pied

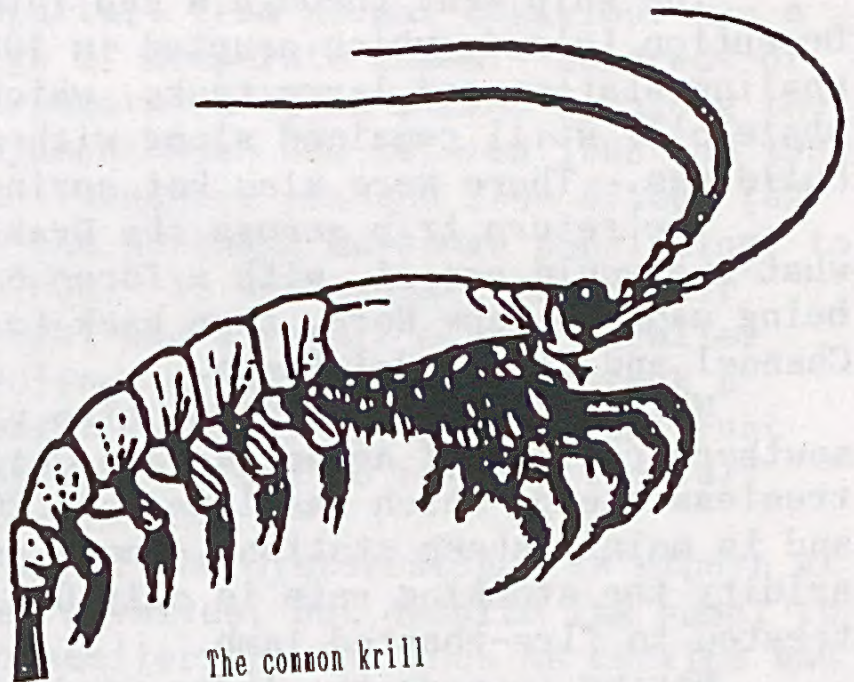
cormorants, white necked herons also flock of 20-30 nankeen night herons, and latham's snipe, Clunes, Middle Swamp and Merrin Merrin, mid November, much more water this year, Greg Binns. // 70 swan nests and 220 cygnets this year on Lake Wendouree, Carol Hall / John Gregurke.

A TRIP TO ANTARCTICA AND PATAGONIA

With Richard Naisbitt unable to attend our December meeting, Carol Hall kindly stepped in and gave us a talk about her recent trip to Antarctica and Patagonia.

Carol's journey started with a flight to Buenos Aires, followed by a 48 hour boat trip from Ushuaia, Argentina's southern-most port, to the Antarctic Peninsula. This route avoids the week of boat travel from Australia to Antarctica, and the Peninsula itself offers many advantages for visitors. Protruding into more northerly latitudes than the rest of Antarctica, it is not so cold, the average summer temperature is zero degrees and since sea water freezes at -1.8 degrees much of the sea is ice free. As a result the area has an abundance of wildlife.

Despite its fearsome reputation the voyage across Drake Passage was pleasantly smooth and we were shown slides of black-browed and wandering albatrosses which were following the ship. Arriving at the Peninsula travellers were taken ashore in zodiaks to see a colony of gentoo penguins, a section of ice was stained pink due to krill coloured excreta.



The common krill
Euphausia superba

We were shown Antarctic hair grass, one of only 3 flowering plants growing in the Antarctic. Large leopard seals were lounging on the beach and south polar skuas were busy scavenging. There were the remains of an old boat, probably used for sealing or whaling, fur seals were almost wiped out at the turn of the century. Chinstrap penguins were shown climbing up a steep hill to their nesting site, an arduous task, but providing protection from the leopard seals etc.

Over the years many bases have been established in

attempts to substantiate land claims. A visit was made to a Ukranian research station which was investigating the hole in the ozone layer. A visit was made to the British station Port Lochroy and another British station which has been abandoned. Mention was made of a Russian research station which was extracting ice cores to gather information about the climate in the past, this should prove valuable in the current debate concerning predicted climate changes. They have drilled down to a depth of 2km, Antarctica has ice to a depth of 4km in places. About 6-8000 tourists visit Antarctica a year but Carol said she only saw one other ship. We were shown crab-eater seals which actually eat krill. There was a cold snap which produced snow for a day and caused the sea to freeze. The ship pressed on to the Antarctic circle at 66° 33', where champagne was brought out for celebration. We were then shown a golden sunset at a spot where Carol and others slept the night on shore. More wildlife followed :- blue eyed shags, young elephant seals, adolie penguins and a weddell seal which was eating snow because of the relatively hot weather.

The ship went through a gap into the crater of volcanic Deception Island, which erupted in 1969. It used to be a whaling station and large tanks, which were used for storing whale oil, still remained along with remains of accommodation buildings. There were also hot springs nearby.

The return trip across the Drake Passage was more like what one would expect, with a force 6 gale blowing, a detour being made to Cape Horn, then back to Ushuaia via the Beagle Channel and Tierra del Fuego.

While in the area, Carol also visited Patagonia, the southern regions of Argentina and Chile. She started on the treeless steppe which has less than 200mm of annual rainfall and is mainly sheep stations, known as estancias. Due to the aridity the stocking rate is only 0.5 sheep/Ha, but Carol was treated to fire-roasted lamb.

Moving towards the Andes, and higher rainfall, there was more scrub and more wildlife, we were shown rhea, guanaco (like a llama) and grey fox in the Torres del Paine NP. Moving onto Los Glaciares NP we were shown glacier gouged lakes and spectacular granite pillars - which were a great contrast to the surrounding smooth, rounded fold hills. Wildlife included flamingos (native to Chile), black-necked swans and upland geese. Much of the flora resembled that of Australia, due to the gondwana link ages ago. The chilean fire bush looked very much like a grevillea. There are three nothofagus species:- *N. betuloides* - evergreen beech, *N. antarctica* - tallbeech, deciduous and *N. pumilio* - dwarf beech.

We finished with Carol's speciality - rocks and glaciers. There was a spectacular sunrise shot of Mt Fitzroy and other granite intrusions. At Lake Grey there was a glacier trapped by terminal moraine. We were shown rocks embedded in a glacier and a rock slab that had been scratched by the glacier moving over it.

The final slide was something seldom seen. The cliff face of a glacier had ice which was very old, you could tell it was old, because with time and pressure the air bubbles (which usually make ice appear white) had been expelled, and the ice was showing its true colour - blue!

Brian Andrews

THE VERGE OF DISASTER

Commuters at Kings Lynn, Norfolk, UK, had a most unusual spectacle in the early 90's. Flocks of oystercatchers were on the roundabouts and roadside verges probing for worms. This departure from normal behaviour was a sign of desperate times. Hundreds of corpses were being picked up along the adjacent Wash and between 1988 and 1998 their numbers plunged from 47,000 (5% of the northern European population) to 10,000. It was assumed that their plight was a result of the parallel decline in shellfish but it took a long-term study by the British Trust for Ornithology to unravel the full story.



Illustration: Ann Hobday

With its thick, red bill, the oystercatcher is expert at winking open tough-shelled bivalves, but despite its name, it usually confines itself to smaller species such as cockles and mussels. Needless to say it often gets blamed for damaging fisheries. In the Burry Inlet in south Wales the bird's population doubled in size during the 60's as a consequence of an increase in shellfish. The local fishermen argued that a cull was needed and 10'000 were shot - but then the cockle population crashed as well!

In the Wash the oystercatchers were the victims of the collapse of the estuary's cockle fishery. The shellfish are being affected by prevailing north easterlies - exceptional winds that are thought to be a product of global climate change. These winds blow fertilized eggs into the North Sea so they cannot add to the local population. At the same time the

mussel fishery failed to re-establish itself on usual beds, probably due to over-fishing. The decline in food meant hard times for the oystercatchers, which explained their appearance in town, and within a decade numbers had fallen by 80%.

However there is one good side to the story, fishermen realizing that their fortune is closely tied to that of the birds have changed their mussel cultivation methods for mutual benefit. New cultivation methods have been introduced which involve moving the young stock from subtidal areas to the inter-tidal zone. The shellfish grow well here and make available crucial winter food for the oystercatchers. But the birds return the favour - they "weed" out the smaller mussels, which results in a lower density and allows a healthy harvestable mussel crop to develop.

Summary of an article in the Guardian Weekly, 4.11.00
Submitted by Eileen Anderson

"CLARKESDALE"...LINTON,...December 3rd

Our first destination on a fine, somewhat warm afternoon was the original 'bird block' of the Bird Observers' Club of Australia, Clarkesdale Bird Sanctuary.

The dry conditions indicated that this area had not benefited from the spring rains enjoyed by surrounding districts.

Never the less there was a pleasing number of flowering plants and many of the well established non-endemic shrubs, from early plantings, viz, grevilleas, hakeas and wattles were flowering.

Fields of tussocky grasses were a feature of the open spaces between the species. The native grasses were interspersed with a rich variety of many low perennial herbs and these included Chocolate Lily (*Arthropodium strictus*), Scaly Buttons (*Leptorhynchus squamatus*), Yellow Rush Lily (*Tricoryne elatior*), Blue Grass Lily (*Caesia callianthus*), Common Everlasting (*Chrysocephalus apiculatum*), Sweet Hound's-tongue (*Cynoglossum suaveolens*), Blue Pincushion (*Brunonia australis*), Curved Rice-flower (*Pimelea curviflora*) and Small St. John's-wort (*Hypericum gramineum*).

At the wetland (approx. 25% of capacity) a small population of birds was made up of eleven species including a fine, mature Swamp Harrier.

The later part of the afternoon was spent in the block west of the cottage where extensive Australian native plantings have become established. The shrub layer includes many grevilleas, banksias and wattles but an old and gnarled Sweet Bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*) caught our attention and was

greatly admired. A beautiful tree, the Silver Gum (*Eucalyptus crenulata*) seen growing near the dam, provided an interesting contrast to the other nearby taller eucalypts. Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda australis*) was beginning to display its showy red anthers and another grass frequently seen in this block was the slender Weeping Grass (*Microlaena stipoides*), a plant of the sunny open areas.

The bird list increased by ten in this block to reach a total of thirty seven species for the afternoon. Of particular interest were Satin Flycatcher, White Winged Triller, Mistletoe Bird (2 pairs) and Australian Raven. The Honeyeater presence was restricted to White Naped, Yellow Faced, New Holland and Red Wattle Bird.

Members enjoyed a picnic tea by the cottage dam then returned to Ballarat via Piggoreet. A stop at Devil's Kitchen on the Woody Yaloak Creek failed to produce a sighting of the Peregrine Falcons, but members agreed that the whole outing had been a relaxed and fruitful conclusion to our activities for the year 2000.

Greg Binns (+PM)

REQUESTS

13 Marine National Parks in Victoria?

We want to see that! Support requested for VNPA's campaign to have 13 Victorian marine national parks and 11 marine sanctuaries. The parks and reserves were recently recommended by the Environment Conservation Council.

www.vnpa.org.au.

Elm Leaf Beetle found in Geelong, Kyneton and Bendigo last November. Evidence that it is in Bacchus Marsh. Concern that it will reach Ballarat's 6000 elm trees. Anyone who detects the beetle is asked to contact the City of Ballarat on 5320 5761 or ELB hotline 0409 870860. Further information also available on www.vicnet.net.au/-fote/



Ed

DECEMBER POSER...RONG SPELLING

Ken McDonnell was quick to point out that the spelling of color in scientific names is perfectly correct because scientific names are in latin and the latin spelling did not finish with ...our. You may wonder why we have digressed to using the u, I found the answer as an Editors Note, in the Letters section of the 12th Nov. Herald Sun :- "The original Latin spelling of most such words is color, favor, honor and so on. The "u" was added by the French and taken to England in 1066. Some Words lost it early on (we used to have governour

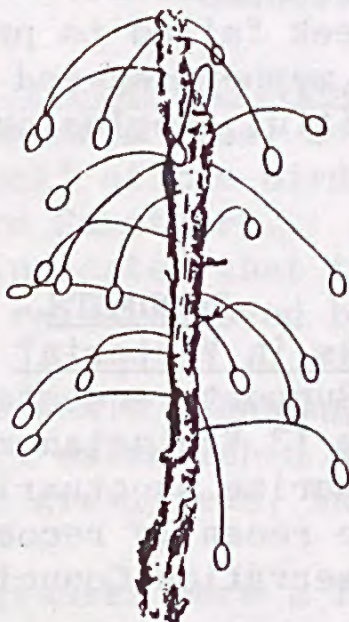
and horror), and others retained it. Australian newspapers have been using the short version for well over 100 years, long before any American influence."

And if you are still wondering what carpet snake is not a reptile, well, my copy of Jean Galbraith's, Wild Flowers of South-East Australia says Carpet Snake is *Maytenus bilocularis* a small tree named from 'carpet snake' bands of dark colour on lighter trunk in most forms...

BDA

FEBRUARY POSER...BACKYARD HOLIDAY

We don't run activities in January because so many people go away, but even if you stayed at home you could still have seen plenty of interest. With the warm weather you should have seen plenty of invertebrates, in fact you probably saw what's below:-



But what are they?

Pictures from "The Garden Jungle" by Densey Clyne.

BDA

Acknowledgements: Krill, p2, from "The Sierra Club - Handbook of Whales and Dolphins" by Leatherwood and Reeves. HB.

Feathertail glider on p6 is Logo of VNPA.

-----***----- FNCB -----***-----

Meetings are held at the Ballarat Horticulture Centre, corner of Gregory and Gillies Streets, ie. the NW corner of the Botanic Gardens, VICROADS 254 F8, commencing at 7-30pm

Excursions depart from Creswick Plaza, VICROADS 255 M10, at 9-30 am, unless specified otherwise.

Committee: Claire Dalnan (President).. , Greg Binns (Vice President).. , John Gregurke (Secretary).. , Bob Curtain (Treasurer).. , Brian Andrews (Editor).. , Helen Burgess, Maureen Christie, Lyndsay Fink, Carol Hall, John Mildren, Pat Murphy.

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